

EXHIBIT

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DATE

3/18/2013

SB

342

House Education  
Honorable Kris Hansen, Chairman  
63<sup>rd</sup> Montana State Legislature  
Capitol Building  
Helena, MT

March 18, 2013

RE: Senate Bill 342; Establish Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program

Sponsor: Jonathan Windy Boy

Madam Chair and Committee Members,

My Name is Shane Morigeau. Morigeau is spelled M-O-R-I-G-E-A-U. I am here today on behalf of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in support of Senate Bill 342.

This bill recognizes the importance of Tribal languages to the people and communities they belong to. The essence of a culture is not in its artifacts or other tangible things, but rather in its language. Early assimilationists understood this principle; which is why their primary tactic to eliminate native cultures was to eliminate native languages. They sent the youngest generations to schools where the children were punished for speaking their language. Today, only a small fraction of native speakers exist, which is why this preservation bill is essential.

This bill also furthers Montana's constitutional promise to "recognize[] the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians" and to "preserv[e] . . . their cultural integrity." (Article X, Section 1(2), Montana Constitution.) Specifically, the State would demonstrate its commitment to preserve the cultural integrity of Tribes by dedicating resources to help tribes preserve their languages. The bill specifically sets out that it seeks to educate all Montanans and it is important to not forget that members of Montana Tribes are also citizens of Montana.

Lastly, in addition to Montanan's constitutional guarantees, the CSKT believe in its own responsibility to preserve our languages. This is why the CSKT has a Salish immersion school on the Flathead Reservation. However, with severely limited funds, the program struggles to get by each year. This bill will help strengthen that particular program. It is also important to note, that there are two traditional languages spoken on the Flathead Reservation, both Salish and Kootenai. This bill could help the CSKT to establish a Kootenai language program.

The CSKT urge this committee to support this bill as tribal languages are not only important to tribes but they are culturally important to Montana and the identity of this great State.

Shane Morigeau  
CKST Lobbyist